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It is fabled that nine hundred years ago the Norsemen riding the white horses of the shoals, dismounted upon Nantucket, its original European discoverers. But this is hardly to be believed, for they did not stay here. Conditions the world over have changed much since the day of the Vikings, but still today he who comes to Nantucket must emulate them and ride the same white horses of the shoals, for they surround the island and prance for the modern steamer as they did for the long Norse ships with the weird figure-heads and the bulwarks of shields. Blown down from New Bedford by a rough nor'wester we plunged through the green rollers south of Hedge Fence shoals, wallowed among the white surges of Cross Rip, and found level water only between the black jetties of Nantucket harbor, where in the roar of bursting waves the white spindrift fluffed and drifted across like dry snow on a January day.

Within lies the old town, more sedately and unconsciously its very self in April than at any other time of year. The scalloping is done, prohibited by law after the first and the dredges no longer vex the sandy shallows of the land-locked harbor behind gray Coatue. The summer visitor has not yet come and the town is its very, peaceful, indeed slumbrous self. The bustle of the day comes with the arrival of the steamer at four o'clock. From then until darkness falls Main street is busy. The curfew, falling in sweet tones from the old watch tower, voiced by the silver-tonged "Lisbon bell," lulls all to sleep and indeed long before that only an occasional footfall resounds from the flagging. At seven the same bell rouses all to the morning's leisurely bustle, and again at twelve it rings a noon somnolence in upon Main street that is even more startling to the stranger than the evening quiet.

For the full length of the noon hour one may stand at the door of the Pacific Bank and look down the broad cobble-paved, elm-shaded stretch of Main street to the door of the Pacific Club and be quite deafened by a step on the brick sidewalk and fairly shy at the shadow of a passer, so lone is the place. If it were not for the travelling salesmen, a score or so of whom come in with every boat, flood with their tiny tide the two hotels that are open and ebb again the next morning with the outgoing boat, there were even less visible life at this season. Yet Nantucket has today a permanent population of about three thousand, which is swelled to thrice that number when the summer hegira is at its height. That means, including the island, which is at once all one town, and, with a few tiny off-shoot islands along its shore, all one county, the only instance in Massachusetts where county and town have the same boundaries.

Geologically Nantucket is a terminal moraine, a great hill of till which the once all-prevalent glacier scraped from the mainland and dropped where it now lifts clay cliffs and stretches sandy shoals to the warm waves of the Gulf Stream. Bostonians who know their geology should feel at home in Nantucket, for while it is superficially allied to Cape Cod, the pebbles of the stratified gravel on the north being in a large part derived from the group of granite rocks known on the neighboring mainland, perhaps half of the mass being of that nature, the remainder is of the felsite and felsite-porphyries so common in the region about Boston. Here and there are a few big boulders, believed by geologists to have been dropped by stranding icebergs and without doubt natives of Greenland.

The island holds vegetation also imported from far distant areas and established long before man, civilized man at least, came to it.

On favored uplands one finds the

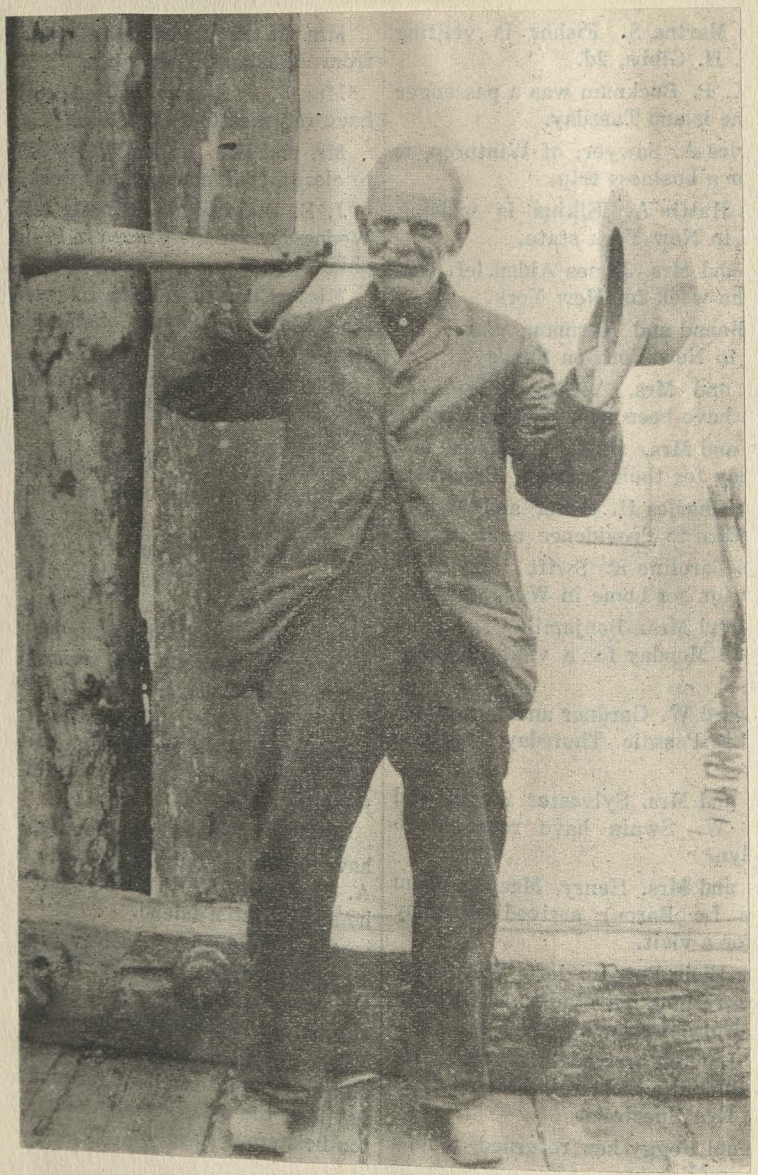
Scotch heather and he might think it had been brought by the loving hand of some Scotchman were it not for the fact that the earliest settlers found it here. They came, these earliest settlers, in 1659, Thomas Macy and his wife, Edward Starbuck, James Coffin and Isaac Coleman, a boy of twelve, storm-tossed about Cape Cod and over the shoals, all the way from Salsbury. For them the merry-men breakers on the shoals danced as they do for the incomers of today. They were not sailors, not even the master of the ship. Perhaps that is why they kept on to the end of the two hundred-mile voyage. At any rate, they did, and they found the Scotch heather here. Here too, one finds another strange plant, plentiful over on the sandy peninsula of Coatue, the Opuntia or prickly pear, a variety of cactus common enough in Mexico and portions of our Southwest, but surprising on this island.

In these two plants at least east and west stand face to face across Nantucket harbor, the cactus holding the sandpit to the north, the heather on the main island to the south. In April the prickly pear is as ugly as sin to the eye, with its lobster-claw growth, uglier still to the hand with its steel-pointed thorns, but later it will put forth wonderful yellow, wild-rose like blooms in rich profusion, making up for all its dourness. Professor Asa Gray, the distinguished botanist of a half century ago, used to say that nothing in the way of plant life could surprise him on Nantucket. Probably this juxtaposition of cactus and heather prompted the feeling.

Nantucket town straggles from beach to hill-top and along shore at its own sweet will, gradually merging into wind-swept moreland on the south and east and west. Here, again, Bostonians should be at home, for the streets grew no doubt from cow-paths winding leisurely from house to pasture, and down them at night, even now, some of them, the cows stray and nibble on the homeward way. I fancy no town so individual in its characteristics still remains in the State. The very pavements smack of it. Here is old-time cobblestone, then long, smooth stretches of asphalt. Again, just dirt, and the three meet and mingle in stretches long and short, in whose variations one seeks in vain for a reason. So with sidewalks, brick passes to flagging, to asphalt, to dirt and back again in the distance of half a block. And even the brick changes often and suddenly. Here it lies flat, ten feet along it is on edge, perhaps ten feet further on end. A blind man could know his exact location in any part of the town simply by the sound of his own footfall on the sidewalk surface beneath him.

So it is with the houses, and I fancy in this lies one great charm of the town to the city-bored summer visitor. No doubt every old sea-dog was his own architect and the houses show it from main truck to keelson. Yet hardly in a single instance is the result displeasing, within or without, above decks or below. Instead, there is a fine harmony of contrasts that delights while it rests. As for location, it would seem as if each shipmaster, once he had the structure launched, brought her up at full tide and let her lie just where she stranded when the ebb began. So they rest today, jumbled together in friendly neighborliness or slipping down the tide toward the harbor on the one hand and toward the wide high seas of the downs on the other. The town melts into the open either way and belongs to it, merging gently with no possibility of shock or rudeness. So it is with the people, the real Nantucketers. Each intensely individual, they yet blend in a wholesome harmonious whole that joins the outside world with little friction. The sailor instinct is strong in them, and they bring their barks alongside the dock or the stranger with a pleasant hail and without a jar.

As the silver-toned sister bell of the Unitarian church tower dominates the sounds of the town so the gilt dome of this church tower dominates



the town to the eye of the inbound mariner, as he swings round Brant Point. So, too, in more than one way, since its building in 1810, this strong tower has dominated the home life of the city. Its glassed-in crow's nest has been the city's watch tower for a century and a year. And so in a measure it is today. The fire alarm system, now modern and electric, warns of fire by its means, summoning the firemen to boxes by numbers rung. Yet it is only about five years that the town has had that system. Before that the old tower was literally a watch-tower, occupied always by one of three superannuated seamen who watched for fires, and seeing one rang the bell and shouted the location to the fire department. One stood watch in the glassed-in octagon above. Two sat by the fire and smoked in a room in the belfry below. If the wind was in the east they put the stove pipe out of a hole in the west side of the tower. If it blew from the west the stove pipe was readily changed to a windowpane on the east side. These watchmen were paid $350 a year, practically a dollar a day, and they seem to have been as efficient as the lately installed electrical appliance.

From the crow's nest to the church roof this old tower is pencilled and carved with the names of Nan'ucketers, written in for the last hundred years and many an otherwise forgotten man and event is thus recorded for the use of future historians. Yet it is safe to say that no man of all the island dwellers ever did or ever will tread the stairs or look from the octagonal windows with a more intense individuality than that of Billy Clark, Nantucket's town-crier, now lamentably dead since 1907. Each afternoon he climbed to the crow's nest with horn under his arm to watch for the daily incoming steamer. He could sight it about an hour before it would dock and as soon as he did the horn blew grandly and his voice rang out over the town in a rhyme, doubtless of his own composing.

Hark, hark, hear Billy Clark,
He's tooting from the tower.
He sees the boat, she is afloat.
She'll be here in an hour.

And so she would, and before she touched the dock Billy deftly caught a bundle of Boston papers and racing up town sold them all before the passengers were off the boat, unless they moved quickly. But these were but a few of Billy's multitudinous activities. He cried auctions and sales, entertainments of all sorts, and if for any reason a public affair must be suddenly postponed, the quickest way to get the news about was to slip a half dollar to Billy, who forthwith cried the matter with amazing celerity and vehemence from all the street corners, tooting his horn between whiles to get the attention of all. Weekly or oftener Billy used to cry meat auctions in the lower square, which have always been a Nantucket institution; at these one bids for his first choice of cuts and having bid highest is allowed such portions and such amounts of the "critter" as he pleases.

Billy Clark made much money, as money was reckoned in his day on the island, but he had no faculty for keeping it or even keeping account of it. For thirty years his returns for his newspapers sold were made from time to time to the Boston office in, seemingly, such sums as struck his fancy as being appropriate. These were more than adequate, for by and by the office sent down word, "Tell Billy Clark for heaven's sake to quit sending us money. He is too far ahead of us."

As might have been expected Nantucket's town crier died poor and would have been in want had not a subscription paper been started for him by the local paper. This, made up in large part by summer visitors and off-islanders, amounted to several hundred dollars, and at the end there were forty dollars left with which to buy him a tombstone. I have not seen this tombstone. It ought to have a horn neatly graven, but I suppose it

has not. The town misses him, needs him; more than one citizen says that, but so individualistic a place makes no attempt to get another. There is something of the Quaker idea in that, for though the island was once a great Quaker stronghold few if any of the old sect remain. But it is the Quaker idea. A new town crier will arrive when the spirit moves. Till then the horn is silent. An off-islander might suppose that the town crier was appointed in town meeting, as is the fence-viewer, the sealer of weights and measures, the pound-keeper and the hog-reeve. But that is not so. Billy Clark evolved himself so to speak, and the town patiently waits a second coming.

From the watch tower one looks down many-flued chimneys and sees a score or so of railed-in platforms on the very house-tops, often surrounding the chimney. These are the "ship-masters' walks," often known as the "wives' walks." From these one gets a long look off to sea and can readily fancy wives and sweethearts climbing to them to watch for some whaleship that left port perhaps three years before. I fancy them too high, too breezy and too conspicuous for much walking by these. Thence one may see the lightships that mark the shoals that rim the island round, and get a broad view of the open downs to southward that tempt one to tramp, seeking the edge of the Gulf Stream, led by the steady roar of its breakers pulsing against the clay cliffs. On the downs one gets a sense of the whole of the island as nowhere else. Here it is a ship at sea, unsinkable and steady, blown upon by the free winds of all the world. In the half-gale out of the west I note the smell of the shoals, a suggestion of bilge in the brine, not altogether pleasant. I fancy a heavy sea stirs the slimy depths and brings their ooze uppermost. I had noticed this from an incoming liner's deck when off the lightship before, but charged it to the ship. Now I know it for a strange odor of the sea. It makes me half believe the humorous, oft-told tale of skipper Hackett, who knew his location by tasting the ooze on the tip of the lead. He who

> roared to Marden
> Nantucket's sunk and here we are
> Right over old Marm Hackett's garden.

In a northwest gale the Nantucketer, though far to the southeast, should be able to locate the shoals and steer home by the smell of the wind.

On less uproarious days one gets all along the down the rich, ozonic odor of the deep sea for a fundamental delight. And always with it are the perfumes of the blossoming land. There is tradition of heavy oak timbers once growing on Nantucket, but only the tradition remains. Here now are low forests of stunted pitch pines, sending their rich resinous aroma on all winds. And in late April with these comes the spicy smell of the trailing arbutus, which hides all along the ground among poverty weed, gray eladium moss, and Indian wood grass, sometimes starring the mossy mats of mealy-plum with the pinky-white of its blooms. The mealy plum itself shows faint coral edging of pink young buds, and here and there a thistle plant, stemless as yet, looks like a green and bristly starfish in the grass. Isolated red cedars on this wind-swept down grow round balls of dense green foliage four or five feet in diameter, looking as if it needed but a blow of an ax at the butt to send them rolling down wind like big tumble weeds. Scrub oaks curiously take the same form, and lumps of bayberry, black huckleberries and sweet fern are often rounded off to hemispheres.

Four silver-toned strokes from the old Lisbon bell in the watch tower warn of dawn in Nantucket in late April. This bell was one of six cast in a Lisbon, Portugal, foundry, intended for a Portugal convent of much renown. In 1812, Captain Charles Clasby of Nantucket visited this foundry, bought the bell, which had not yet been dedicated, sending it to the island in the whaleship William and Nancy, Captain Thomas Cary, and in

1815 it was hung in the tower. Soon after the stroke of four the sparrows begin to chatter, but before long one hears through their uproar the clear whistle of meadow larks. These flit familiarly about the lower levels of the town singing from gate-post or shed-roof all day long and on the downs they vie with the song sparrows in breaking the lone silence of the place. Save for these, a crow or two and the shadow of a sailing hawk, the uplands lack bird life in April.

He who would see birds in plenty, as well as much other wild life, should go over Maddaket way and sit on the shore of Long Pond. There I found the bushy swales alive with marsh birds. Blackbirds gurgled all about. The reedy shallows held many bitterns whose sepulchral "Cahugancagunk, cahugancagunk" sounded ventriloqually from the reeds. Coot, sea duck, loons, black duck, grebes, dotted the surface of the pond and in all the sandy shallows spawning alewives splashed and played—thousands of them. I had thought spawning a serious business with fish, not to be entered upon lightly or without due consideration. Yet these made a veritable romp of it. And in the crystal clear air overhead, swept clean of all city soot, soared a marsh hawk or two and an osprey. There was more than clarity to this atmosphere. It had an elusive, mirage-creating quality that made the osprey look startingly large as he soared near. It was enough to make one remember the roc that Sinbad saw and get under cover. But he took an alewive instead of me. All along the island in the steep of the sun the air had this magnifying quality. It loomed the white headstones in the cemetery on the hill back of the town till they seemed bigger than the town itself, symbolic perhaps of how large a proportion of its former glory lies here.

Nantucket's one boat out at this time of year leaves at seven in the morning. From its deck across its churning wake the most conspicuous building is the old watch tower whose gilded dome gleams friendily. And as the beams of the morning sun strike this, like the tower of Memnon it gives forth music, the silver-tongued call of the old Lisbon bell. "Come back, come back," it cadences to all who pass, the melody clinking clear far over the level sea. It seems the spirit of Nantucket born of its warm spring sun, its soft winds and the friendly lives of the islanders themselves, a pleading that echoes long in the memory and that few can resist.

NANTUCKET HARBOR.